

POEMS FROM BEHIND
THE IRON CURTAIN

Back to Life

EDITED BY
ROBERT CONQUEST

In 1955 and 1956 the authorities in the Soviet block began to allow a little latitude to their writers. The result was that extraordinary movement in which the most articulate part of the community put forward again the claims of truth and of feeling. The poems in this collection were all published in the Soviet Union or the Communist states of Eastern Europe. They were all, or almost all, written by convinced Communists. They were all strongly censured by the authorities as incompatible with the Communist view of literature. In poetry particularly it has always been difficult for bureaucrats in the censors' office to determine when orthodox limits have been passed. So, to an extent at least, the poet is able to speak while the rest of the population must remain silent. In these conditions real meaning is taken on by expressions like that of the Czechoslovak poet, Kana, that the poet should be 'the conscience of his people'. The protest is not against the theories of Communism. It is concerned with the contrast between the Party's words and the facts. It expresses the lesson the writers have learnt over

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the years: that the suppression of a free literature cannot be anything but a sign of government based on bad faith and unreal dogma. These poems speak, often modestly and mildly, for the personal life and for truth, against the theory that they should be sacrificed for supposed political advantages. This is not the first time that writers and poets have been faced with such a situation. Under past autocracies literary awakenings of this kind have proved to be the predecessors of great social and political changes. This collection is both a social and a literary document of enormous significance and impact.



Poems
from behind
the
Iron Curtain

Back to Life

Edited by Robert Conquest



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. . . a certain section of our literary and artistic intelligentsia, among whom there had spread a bourgeois-anarchist, individualistic conception of the creative liberty of the artist, directed against the Party supervision of art.

Leading article in the Soviet theoretical organ 'Voprosy Filosofii', September 1957

[Marx] said that poets are original creatures, that we must let them go their own way.

Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Marx's daughter, quoted in Grünberg's 'Archives for the History of Socialism and the Working Class Movement', Vol. IV.

Where there's tyranny
All is in vain,
Even the song

Gyula Illyés: 'One Sentence on Tyranny,'
'Irodalmi Ujság', November 2, 1956

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Most of the translations of the Polish poems are by Lucjan and Barbara Blit, and appeared in *Twentieth Century*; some of the Hungarian poems, including Gyula Illyés' 'One Sentence on Tyranny', were translated by Paul Tabori.

Introduction

ROBERT CONQUEST

THE POEMS collected here are the results of an extraordinary movement which has swept the minds of the creative writers of the countries of Russia and Eastern Europe* over the last few years. All the poems were printed and published in the countries concerned. Their writers were almost all Communists and many of them favourites of the regime. At the end of 1955, and even more in 1956, for various political reasons it became possible for writings to appear which did not simply ring the changes on the 'Ode to Stalin' stereotype.

The Communist rulers only made their concessions reluctantly. Yet Beria's police empire had been broken, and many leading police officials were about to fall on charges of having framed the Titoites—an unavoidable result of the Soviet reconciliation with Yugoslavia. In general, the Russians were discouraging overt police action in literature and were themselves experimenting with a slight tempering of Zhdanovist rigour. And the denunciation of Stalin's repression, with the rehabilitation, among others, of imprisoned and executed writers, led to a further comparative relaxation in the intellectual atmosphere.

This is not to say that the regimes wished for a free literature but, as they made clear at the time, that they hoped that a literature less obviously contemptible than that of the Stalin epoch would appear in support of the official viewpoint. The Communist writers, even when they were producing little or nothing, were financially favoured to an extraordinary degree. And on a cynical view they might have been expected to show gratitude, like the well-fed performing horses in Filip's allegory on p. 55.

*This collection does not cover China. But very much the same ferment has been taking place there, and a typical result was the recent punishment of Miss Ting Ling, long the Party's leading poet, for the same offences as those committed by the poets of Russia and Eastern Europe.

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Nevertheless concessions were small and in most cases liable to revocation. Literary editors, with commendable courage, published daring

verses only to see issues of their magazines confiscated or apologies extorted in the next number's editorial. Nor was it a case at first of big opportunities. Several of the earlier Hungarian poems given here, for instance, evaded, or attempted to evade, censure by being couched in historical form. Lenin writes of the 'Æsopian' language in which Bolshevik pamphlets had to be written before the Revolution, and explains that where he had to pretend to be attacking Japanese or other imperial practices the reader easily understood that he really meant those of Tsarist Russia. In the same way the Hungarian reader had no difficulty in realizing that in his play about the Dosza Gyoergy revolt hundreds of years ago Gyula Illyés had the Rakosi regime in mind, and that couplets like

The country is blindly rushing to its doom.
Nobody holds the reins, though three tried to grab them

referred to Rákosi, Gerő, and Farkas. The ability to understand oblique allusions becomes highly developed under a despotism, just as in Schiller's days, and with some of the poems (for instance, those on pages 63, 64 and 65) it may be difficult for the English reader to understand the impact made at the time, unless he bears this in mind.

One can see how at first poems began to appear on the ordinary themes of poetry, so long perverted. And then there came indirect attacks on aspects of the tyranny, sometimes in historical disguise. And then the poets became more outspoken (or found it possible to print poems often written long before, like Illyés' 'One Sentence on Tyranny' actually written in 1950 but not published till November 1956). In Hungary, in the end, we get the heroic and satirical verse of open denunciation, which appeared during the temporary triumph of the revolution, in the issue of the Hungarian *Irodalmi Ujság* (Literary Gazette) published on November 2, 1956. Since then there is silence (except in a number of fine poems by writers who escaped to the West, which do not come within the scope of this book). The only voice from the Communist countries on the final crime is the short and moving poem (on p. 107) by the Polish poet Ważyk, who was present in Budapest during the October fighting and who laments the Polish *raison d'État* which stops him speaking out more strongly.

Most of these Hungarian poets were veteran Communists. They were of both generations. Gyula Illyés, one of the great names in Hungarian post-war literature, is fifty-five. Kassák played a part in the

1919 Communist Revolution, although he later became a Socialist. But László Benjámin, born in 1915, of proletarian origin, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Budapest Communist Party, is more typical. Aczél, a Stalin prizewinner, was born in 1921: he is also celebrated for the first open attack in prose on the secret police. He has since escaped to the West. Tamási, too, born in 1923, was a Communist, a proletarian and the recipient of government awards: he was arrested after the revolt but has since been released. Juhász is younger still.

Zoltan Zelk, another Communist, whose poem on page 66 conveys so strikingly the atmosphere of the police terror, fell into the hands of the AVH after the revolution and was one of the writers sentenced with Tibor Déry, doyen of Hungarian Communist literature, at the notorious trial in the autumn of 1957.

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Among the Polish poems a fairly similar evolution can be seen—without, of course, the extremes of triumph and of silence with which the Hungarian ones end. Ważyk's famous *Poem for Adults* had an enormous effect, and not only on literature. A convinced Communist, he had been ill in the country for some years, and on his return to Warsaw had been shocked at what he saw. As a result of this poem he was summoned before Berman, the Politburo member in charge of the secret police, and hectored. 'Je me suis aperçu', Ważyk later told a Western journalist, 'que nous étions gouvernés par des imbéciles': his allegiance to a doctrine no longer meant that he was prepared to accept its official oracles against his own judgement. He saw that a thousand individual imbeciles, a thousand bureaucrats and propagandists and sophists, do not become possessed of some mystic collective wisdom simply by being formed into a political organization. And so it was with the other poets: they began openly to set against the alleged infallibility of 'the Party'—i.e. Berman and his like—the evidence of their own eyes, and of their own minds and hearts.

Like Ważyk, Jastrun had written much Party-line poetry. Hertz was also associated with them in a Marxist weekly after the war. Another convinced Communist was Woroszyński, who later reported the Hungarian Revolution in bitter prose.

In the past year the Polish Government, while its cultural policy remains liberal compared with those of its neighbours, has imposed restrictions of a type highly unwelcome to the writers who played such

a useful part in creating the mood which brought Gomulka to power. So much so, that the suppression of *Po Prostu* in the autumn of 1957, its most repressive action so far, led to the resignation from the Party of Ważyk, Jastrun, and Hertz, though some of the other writers given here remain Party members.

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This collection is, of course, not exhaustive. But there are two quite different reasons. In the case of the Poles and Hungarians and to some degree the Russians, there is so much material that a selection has had to be made. But it is also true that in other cases poems which are known to exist have proved inaccessible, so far at least. Thus the peripheral regions of the U.S.S.R. are inadequately represented. This also applies to the more remote European Communist states—in which, in addition, the policy of relaxation did not go even as far as in Russia.

Although none of the countries of the Communist bloc was wholly unaffected by the political and literary 'thaw', in several of them the political leadership appointed in Stalin's time remained entrenched, making only minor concessions. This applies particularly to Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Rumania.

It is instructive to look briefly at the Czechoslovak example. Little of the direct expression found in Hungary and Poland is apparent in the Czechoslovak poems given here. But it can easily be shown that this was not through any lack of a will to liberty and truth. At their Congress in April 1956, the writers spoke up openly. They were threatened by Antonin Novotny, First Secretary of the Party, for 'unprincipled liberalism'. Vice-Premier Kopecky said: 'Throughout its seven days' duration the Writers' Congress frequently assumed such a political character that we cannot pass over it silently.' The delegates were told that the end of Stalinism meant simply that in future 'literature will serve the Party and the people all the better and more efficiently'. The writers retorted with honesty. Viteslav Nezval, for instance, said:

'Jaroslav Seifert retired into involuntary silence for several years, having been denounced as a renegade of Socialist poetry. Vladimir Holan still keeps silent, much to the detriment of our poetry. If it were not that he had to introduce himself as a poet of unimaginably lovely children's verse, we would not read the poems by František Hrubín. . . . The gifted and original Jiří Kolar was for a long time an outcast both as man and poet.'

Reference was made to the suicide in November 1951 of Konstantin Biebl as a result of political pressure. Hrubin said:

'There may be moments, days or years of despair . . . that the vacuum beyond the window-sill seems to be such an endless freedom that the poet throws himself out to show once again, and in a futile attempt, that man has no wings. Who, then, is to blame for your death, Konstantin Biebl?'

Other authors blamed themselves for having kept silence during the height of the terror, like Káná who said that he had failed to be what he should have been, 'the conscience of my people'.

These speakers and others were denounced by the Party Central Committee. The writers were silenced. Unable to write freely they ceased to write at all. And in June 1957 a new meeting of the Union of Writers was called at which the Prime Minister, Zapotocky, denounced 'a silent demonstration against the Party'. This allegation was repeated by Kopecky. A phrase that has been most frequently condemned, however, was Káná's remark about being the conscience of the people. *Rude Pravo*, the Communist Party organ, hotly denied this claim and added, 'We have seen in Hungary where such an idea leads to'.

Berthold Brecht, the pride of German Communist poetry, had become associated with the intellectual resistance. But most of the published verse of a critical sort consisted of satirical squibs saying that the German youth leaders were secretly advising the use of jazz as the only way of bringing people into their empty youth clubs, attacking the Press for reporting natural disasters as occurring in Western Germany only, and so on. Few of these seem worth printing here: what the remainder are like may be seen from one of the better and broader ones, given on page 49.

In Bulgaria, as in Czechoslovakia, writers have conducted a heavy struggle against the odds. A meeting of the Party organization of the Union of Writers took place in December 1957, at which the writers successfully resisted brow-beating by political spokesmen. Among other abuses attacked by the Tsekists (a hostile epithet applied by writers to that minority which supported the Central Committee, the Tse Ka) were the 'almost hooligan acts' and 'incorrect theories' of the younger poets; the poems of the Communist, Krum Penev, so anti-Party that they 'cause indignation even among non-Party editors'; the 'anti-Party aphorisms and epigrams' of other named writers, and so on. But it seems that the authorities prevented the publication, except by word

of mouth, of much of this material. The verse excerpt from a play by Todor Genov should be taken as representing much more work, which it is hoped will be available to later editors.

In Rumania, though several writers have been victimized for demanding a freer literature, even less unorthodox verse has been allowed to appear. But lately there have been a number of attacks on pessimistic and apolitical poems, and one of these is printed here, for the sake of completeness.

For these few poems from East Germany, Bulgaria and Rumania show that even in the most unpromising environments, poets went beyond permitted bounds. They prove, in fact, that whatever opportunity was offered the Communist writer was taken. Where there was only a small opportunity he made the most of it. But there was nowhere where the slight recession of pressure did not result in the publication of both prose and poetry showing a strong distaste for the main elements of dictatorial rule.

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The Russian poets printed here are in some ways more significant still. For most of them are second generation Soviet writers, those who became celebrated under Stalin's rule. The poets who had grown up by the time of the Revolution are no longer heard from. Yessenin and Mayakovsky committed suicide. Pasternak and Akhmatova survive, but after falling foul of the authorities in 1947 are still practically silent. (A few of the poems which form the epilogue of *Dr Zhivago* appeared in *Znamya* in 1954, and were ill-received. Pasternak's talents are, of course, on a grander scale altogether than those of the poets given here; and it seems perfectly possible that in the far future the Soviet regime may be remembered only for its recent suppression of that great novel.)

At the time when Stalinism was closing in on literature in the early thirties Isaak Babel said, in a phrase that was to become famous, that the writers would now have to exhibit 'the heroism of silence'. He himself, like other writers, perished in the purges, but the phrase was remembered. And when many writers failed at their conferences in 1957 to condemn such writings as the poems given in this collection they were violently accused of wishing to practise 'the heroism of silence'.

Most of the Russian poems translated here were taken as attacks on the established order and condemned by the agencies of the regime.

Yet few of them are in the ordinary sense political poems—indeed, true political criticism could scarcely have been published. Their crime from the authorities' point of view is that they either state particular truths irreconcilable with the full rigour of the Party's theories about what things should be like, or they express moods which the rulers cannot assimilate to their narrow ideal of 'Soviet man'. They in no way oppose the organization of society to which the regime is supposed to be devoted. At most they criticize abuses; more usually they speak for the personal life. Authority's attitude to such poems is the clearest possible test of authority's essential nature: and in presuming to condemn them it condemns itself.

Nor is this the case only with established poets. The Young Communist paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on 28 April, 1957, published an attack on the nineteen- and twenty-year-old verse writers of the Literary Institute. One of them had gone so far as to write of 'rusty men of iron' whose purpose was

With their lifeless face
To stun me forever
To make me forget, as they have forgotten
That I ever was a man

Cries are useless
Impenetrable darkness all around
Iron terrifying people
With static minds

I go alone to face
Their endless ranks. . . .

But a twenty-year-old girl was censured almost equally for having written

We walk exhausted
Our hands are cold
You and I are old
As though we were wizards,
You and I are unwanted
In the young forest. . . .

on the ground that such moods are unsuitable in a hundred per cent happy society. So they are.

Writers given here may be completely loyal to the Party, like Olga Berggolts, born in 1910, and famous as the author of poems and other works about the Siege of Leningrad during the war. These poems of

hers were published in 1956, and simply revealed her personal tragedy during the great purge before the war. Her expression of these truths, and of their natural effect on her which she will not disguise, were not well regarded by authority. Margarita Aliger, born 1915, also became celebrated for patriotic poetry during the war. She has been attacked for the pessimism of her poetry and for her editorial activity in connection with the anthology *Literaturnaya Moskva* which was severely censured by the Party. In her case too there seems to be the same struggle between the need for truth and deeply established loyalty to the Party (which led to her being removed in hysterics in March 1957 from a meeting of Moscow writers at which she attempted to put her views to Khrushchev and was simply threatened and abused in return). Kirsanov is older. But he was only eleven at the time of the Revolution. He was a friend of Mayakovsky's and, like Aliger, is a Stalin prizewinner, and famous for patriotic poems in the war. All these poets were censured, often severely. Evtushenko is younger still. And following the printing of the first poem here, which appeared in *Literaturnaya Moskva*, he was expelled from the Young Communist League. But it is Gevork Emin, the prominent Armenian poet, who makes perhaps the strongest and clearest attack on the Party bureaucracy. It is of interest from the context of his poem that it seems to have been drafted fairly soon after the war. The publication of such poetry, depending as it does on the boldness of editors and editorial boards, is a chancy thing and seems less common in the peripheral republics than in Moscow or Leningrad, where whole groups of writers have been showing (and been denounced for) a certain solidarity against the exaggerated claims of the cultural bureaucrats, and thus providing an atmosphere of encouragement.

But though it is difficult to obtain the originals from the far-away corners of the U.S.S.R. there is no doubt that the ferment spread widely. The Writers' Union of Kazakhstan made a series of 'nihilistic' demands which resulted in a purge of their leaders and of the editors of their magazine. The nature of their grievances is only known from hostile accounts in the Russian Press, and Mr. Walter Kolarz, the well-known expert on Soviet dependent territories, states that the original Kazakh documents are unobtainable. The poem from Kazakhstan on page 41, by Krivoshechekov, was in a Russian language paper.

In Azerbaidzhan, at a conference of the *aktiv* of literary and artistic workers reported in the local Press on 14 December, 1957, the Republic's First Secretary, criticizing the works of 'even such eminent

poets' as Suleiman Rustam and others, said that 'Alongside highly artistic, lyrical verses there are not a few ideologically defective ones, expressing superficial feelings and thoughts, purely subjective experiences, devoid of social significance'.

In Tadzhikistan the local Central Committee had a special disciplinary meeting of Tadzhik writers on November 13, 1957, at which it was reported that 'the poet Gafar Mirzo has committed a serious ideological-artistic miscalculation in his poem *Fagfur*. Despite sharp criticism in literary circles G. Mirzo has up to the present still not acknowledged the ideological harmfulness of his work. Nevertheless . . . the author has cast doubt upon the correctness of Party and Government measures taken in the interest of the economic development of the republic.' I have not been able to obtain a copy of this economically harmful poem; and no doubt there are many others.

Heislars' long poem on page 43 has only recently become known in the West. It was at first welcomed by a Soviet Latvian critic in the magazine *Cina* of September 1957 who said that 'He has the courage to write about a theme which has been left untouched by both our writers and Russian writers, and this in spite of the fact that many are aware of this theme much more strongly than of any other theme that has blossomed in the poetry and prose created by the reality of 40 years of Soviet life. . . . It is Heislars' achievement that he demonstrated that Soviet poetry should not ignore the seamy side of the wonderful panorama of our life. All this should serve as a warning, as in an historical museum, so that Soviet reality may develop without such ugly disfigurations. . . .' But since then the poet and the magazine have been subjected to continual attacks. Heislars describes his deportation, and his years in the Arctic, puts the blame on Beria, and attributes his release to the latter's fall. Even so the poem ends gloomily, and apart from that its subject, as in the case of Berggolts, is one which is again regarded as unsuitable for Soviet writers.

In general the Soviet poems that are fairly direct criticisms of social and political conditions are obvious and invariable targets for the attacks of the official Press. But Party claims go much further than this. Akhmatova was criticized in Zhdanov's time for being 'apolitical'. Only a year or two ago Boris Pasternak was censured in *Pravda* for a poem which ended:

Life is only an instant . . .
Only a song, only a dream
Only a grey dove.

The issue is clear. The lyric of the poet's feelings on some theme that strikes his imagination without social implications is not wanted. The expression of personal moods, and in particular those touched with pessimism, is unacceptable. To select frequently for poetic treatment an incident which conveys only doubt and unhappiness as Vanshenkin does in his poem on page 42 is to offend against the laws of 'socialist realism'. Official theory is attempting, in fact, to deny a whole sector of experience, a whole depth of individuality. That it is unable to produce poets who see it the same way is not to be wondered at.

One important recantation has been that of Margarita Aliger. She is said to have written letters of submission as early as the spring of 1957, but it was only in October that a draft regarded as suitable for publication was obtained from her. And, though couched in extremely apologetic terms, its central point remains unorthodox: 'I am sometimes inclined to substitute moral-aesthetic considerations for political ones.' For this is to assert, still, that there is a contradiction between the two. And this, which is not admitted by the Party leadership, is precisely the ground for the writers' dissatisfaction.

6

As soon as the first opportunities presented themselves, or seemed to present themselves, these poems began to appear. As we have said, there is nothing in most of them, in themselves, that shows the slightest hostility to any regime or ideology. Only a ruling group which wants, in effect, its poets not merely to write state poetry but to write nothing but state poetry could object: only, in fact, a totalitarian ideocracy.

It is not that the present Communist rulers do not realize this dilemma. After all, these poems have actually been published in the U.S.S.R., even though they were hotly condemned afterwards. Nor, in Russia at least, have any writers been subjected to penalties other than silence in the last year or so, as far as we know. A totalitarian regime attempting to produce a literature has no choice but oscillate between extreme repression under which only unreadably dull propaganda is published, and giving some rein to its creative writers, of which they immediately take advantage to write humanly.

A lot has been written in the West about 'commitment', *engagement*. It is argued that a writer cannot remain isolated from the great human issues. However, into this reasonable thesis there is often smuggled a

quite different assumption—that commitment to a political party or a particular ideology is *the same as* commitment to humanity.

Most of the poets printed here were 'committed' in the sense in which this word is usually used. They were the poets who accepted the social theories put forward by the Communist Party and they supported that Party. They have now shown that there is a commitment more important to writers than party or doctrine—commitment to truth and to life.

And when it came to the test it was found that one of the fears that have often been expressed was not justified. Totalitarian regimes could not produce writers at once talented and servile. The romantic view of the poet was, on this issue, thoroughly and surprisingly justified. Even moderate talent was shown in the long run to be inseparable from honesty and humanity. Poets who still accept Communist theory are yet not prepared to lie for it or to justify the sufferings of the people. The clash in their minds between doctrine and reality may be painful, but in the long run the urge to truth cannot be suppressed—except by force.

We can now see that elements of decency and idealism survive within the Communist intelligentsia. These poets show that the essential division is not between doctrine and doctrine or party and party, but between truth and lies, humanity and tyranny.

For this is not a collection of anti-Communist poems. Even the most forthright are directed simply against oppression and deceit. To any regime which objects one can only say, if the cap fits wear it. And many of the poems do not voice protest at all: they merely express personal feelings, truths of the human condition. No government or party is compelled to object to them. Any that does is voluntarily accusing itself.

Of those few in the West who took the side of the secret police against the population in the events in Hungary one might say as Orwell did of similar people that one does not know which to despise most, their cynicism or their short-sightedness. Yet perhaps even here some charity is required. Some of these Avophils may be incurable political psychopaths. Others may simply be blinded by dogmas, written in books fifty or a hundred years ago, about entirely different situations. Yet one day perhaps they too may be stimulated by some event or other into the moral and intellectual effort of facing the facts. Ignorance is an excuse and it is worth remembering that it took a great deal of unpleasant reality to destroy the illusions of some of the Eastern

European poets in this book. Indeed, in cases like Ważyk's the exposure of his false ideals was clearly painful, though I do not think we can call it tragic—there was too much real tragedy going on. The essential is that when it came to the showdown the sense of reality was stronger than the sense of ideology.

This collection consists of literal or fairly literal translations. It is not presented as literature, and much of its quality inevitably fails to come through. Yet it is surprising how effective some of the Polish verse, in particular, remains. Perhaps this is because much of the quality of the original often lies in its force and its simplicity. But if these translations were much less effective as literature, they would still be extraordinarily valuable as documents. For they illustrate strikingly the effects of totalitarian society on the strongest and most sensitive minds caught in it. And they show the existence of that goodwill, honesty, and intelligence which may yet in one way or another transform the Communist regimes. In a dangerous world it is good to find a hope: but even without the hope it would be good to find the courage and love of truth so often apparent in these poems.

USSR

Poem

EVGENI EVTUSHENKO

After every lecture
you are disturbed by all around.
You hear flattering compliments
from the young people.
There is so much that is good in life
encounters and theatres and flowers,
but what you ardently long for most
you do not find.

Now you are running up the stairs.
You are eighteen.
In your satchel, with Lenin's profile imprinted,
lies your Komsomol card.
In the ticking midnight
of your sleepy home
I know—you seek help
from great, stern ideas.
And letting down your fair,
thick tresses,
You think of the revolution
and long for all-embracing love.
In the home is heard the tread of the pendulum
and your talk with your soul. . . .
You are still very, very small,
I next to you am very, very big.
You are my junior companion,
I am your elder one.
I am troubled as to what will befall
your fair head,
Tormenting you with anxiety,
in search of the heights.
I have come to believe in many things
just to make you believe in them too.

LITERATURNAYA MOSKVA, No. 1, 1956

Zima Station

Excerpt

EVGENI EVTUSHENKO

Here I was extraordinarily struck
With a poorly lettered fence,
With a drunk lying round in the tea-room
And a row in the queue at the shop. . . .
The driver cursed the Town Soviet,
People were laughing at some fowls fighting,
And dustily, not caring,
Burdocks listened to all this.
The false legs of beggars rattled on the stone,
A little boy was chasing a cat with a stick. . . .

These lines were quoted and criticized in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* of 21 June 1957, for making Siberia appear much as it had been in Tsarist times.

Poem

EVGENI EVTUSHENKO

The frontiers oppress me
I feel it awkward
Not to know Buenos Aires,
New York.
I want to wander
As much as I like
In London,
To talk, however brokenly,
With everybody.
Like a boy
I want to ride
On the bus

Through morning Paris.
I want an art
—As varied as myself.

Quoted in an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of 8 April 1958. The reviewer comments: 'It would not be so bad if Evtushenko wanted only to wander through London and Paris; the trouble is that he resents living inside Soviet frontiers.' As to variation in art, it exists only because one art arouses 'high ideals' and the other 'low instincts'.

Poem

EVGENI EVTUSHENKO

I'd lie on the damp ground
With my arms round my spade.
I'd put a grass-stalk in my mouth,
A stalk of sourish grass.
Digging this cursed soil
Hard enough to break the spade—
I'd much rather go to sleep,
But sleeping's out of the question.
'What!

Can't stand on your feet?
Look at the poor little dove!
These jeers come from a girl
In boots and a sky-blue blouse.
She'll start an annoying song
'When I find myself a sweetie
I'll start tormenting him!
She'll flash her grey spade,
She'll rattle her ear-rings,
And carry on like this
Till even the boys groan.
Everyone laughs:
'What a snake!
Anka, can't keep her mouth shut!'

And only I know
And the stars and the currant bushes
How she goes to the wood with me at night
Among the scented currant bushes,
She parts the grass with her arms
She moves like a tipsy thing,
How, helpless and weak,
She drops her sunburnt arms,
She speaks to me in words
That are beautiful and confused. . . .

OKTYABR, No. 5, May 1957

Poem

EVGENI EVTUSHENKO

Conclusion

. . . With his glass empty
And his mouth stained somehow
The old prospector's crying
Because he's a liar.
Perhaps I'll cry too
And fall across the table
Squander everything
And find nothing.
Meanwhile I'm strong
And the world seems fine
And the barmaid Zina
Is smiling at me.

OKTYABR, No. 5, May 1957

Komsomolskaya Pravda of 21 June 1957 commented 'every production is written in the name of some thought. What is Evtushenko asserting here? What does he want? For lines—emptiness.' The commentator, speaking as an old Bolshevik and the father of five sons and two daughters, called on the Editorial Board of *Oktyabr* to explain to Evtushenko that such verses are 'needed by no one'.

From my Notebook

MARGARITA ALIGER

The rifle regiment retreats from the battle
With a third of its men lost
I must confess I did not dare to lift my eyes
And look into the blackened faces of the survivors.
I walked past them with my head bent low
Afraid of stumbling. . . .

They marched on, one company after another. . . .

Now I am afraid
That there were many things
I did not understand
In those days of my inexperienced youth.

OKTYABR, No. 11, 1956

The Most Important Thing

Excerpts

MARGARITA ALIGER

He lingered at my door,
He brushed the little snowflakes off his coat.
I hardly knew him then,
A handsome, strong man.
He entered my room, he sat beside me
Intently looking round.
I still had time then
To look into his inner self,
And I remembered all I knew about him. . . .

He tempers steel,
He hews stone.
He plants his garden in the steppes.

There are houses built by him
In Leningrad and Vladivostok.
He spans broad rivers with straight bridges.
He writes innumerable books.
He is persistent, persevering.
He is so noble and so brave.
He fought the Fascists
And he has built the Communist world. . . .

He got up, he walked around,
Sat down again and drank his tea. . . .

He suddenly struck a false note,
He lied without reason.
Self-consciously he tried to extricate himself
And calumniated his friend.
Fright flickered in his eye, showing
That he would hide in stormy weather. . . .

Oh dear, what a little man he is!
But, if in the most important things
He is worth anything,
If he is able to discover
Simple chemical components
That would with wonderful force,
Destroy outright with acid
These miserable features
In strong and handsome men.
Which penetrate so often
Into the heart and soul.
If he could kill the ne'er-do-well in the hero,
The scoundrel in the great man . . .
Men would become immortal,
Reach and understand everything.
And our people would believe in him and trust him everywhere.

OKTYABR, No. 11, 1956

These verses were referred to with particular disfavour in the frequent attacks on the author's work which appeared in all the leading Soviet literary and political journals throughout most of 1957.

A Couple

MARGARITA ALIGER

Again they started quarrelling on the tram.
They were not ashamed to do so before strangers.
I could not help feeling a sharp envy and looked at them intently.
They do not know what happiness they have, and nobody could
explain that to them.
They would not understand that here they are, both of them,
They are both alive and can explain and mend everything that divides
them.

NOVY MIR, No. 4, 1957

The Truth

MARGARITA ALIGER

My friend of youthful days was cruelly slandered by his enemies.
He lost his job, he was expelled from our Party.
What can be more dreadful?
Well, dearest soul, let us be frank, at least between ourselves.
Admit that you did not understand what was happening and what you
were doing.
The enemies cunningly screened themselves with dictatorial orders and
pompous phraseology.
They baffled you by attacking unawares;
They knew quite well that their time was short and did not wish to lose
a minute.

My dearest soul, I know you won't forget the sorrow, humiliation and
torture.
We said: 'There must be something in all that . . .'
We raised our hands voting for their calumny.

We should have known that from the Pioneer camps
We marched together and we knew each other through and through.
We should have remembered that from our native Red Presnia,
We marched together to the front line dug-outs.
Later we shared the soldiers' bread advancing from Ilmen to Prague.
If we argued, and we argued fiercely, it was when resting from battle,
But we breathed together when attacking our enemy. . . .

What deep offence, what bitter sorrow and humiliation we felt when
he was accused.

It was as if our youth, our future, our straightforward way of thinking
Were expelled from our Party.

No fire nor shells could destroy our friendship . . .

But, oh bitter shame, I did not try to defend him . . .

I thought: perhaps I did not understand him well?

Perhaps I failed to notice something?

But our Party treasures her revolutionary forces;

The Party knows how to defend all that is sacred to our hearts.

No, no wild wind could ever blow and block up Lenin's road,

My comrade came to me in the early morning; smiled silently when
standing on my threshold.

He smiled, the light shining in his eyes took all my breath away.

I knew that our youth had never been betrayed;

I knew that our Party had got a soldier back into her ranks;

That our truth, the real truth that bound our friendship,

Will stand forever.

I really forget the words I said to him.

But do words matter in such cases?

The human word is nothing in face of feeling.

Forever true and straight our only way.

This inspired truth makes sunshine brighter,

Makes friendship and brotherhood much closer;

Gives us more force for battle, obliterating unimportant, temporary
features.

We thank you, our Party!

1954-6

OKTYABR, No. 11, 1956

My Ordeal

OLGA BERGGOLTS

... I must have strength again
To see, to know,
How all that I have loved will torture me again,
What ugly ghosts will suddenly appear,
What friend will readily betray me
And how another will repudiate me.
They'll try to tempt me
And they'll order—'Recant!'—
And all my soul will shrink
From the dread and anguish.
But I will have the strength
To answer and insist:
—'I won't recant! This is my life, my faith!
No never. . . .'
And I will have strength again
Remembering those days,
To call to all that you have loved:
Come back again, come back!

1938

NOVY MIR, No. 8, 1956

My Answer

OLGA BERGGOLTS

My friends tried to persuade me that all means are good
To save from anger and distress
At least a particle of tragic life, a part of the soul. . . .
But who says that my soul can be partitioned?
How can one half of passion be concealed, without the whole of it
being annihilated?
How can I serve my people only 'partly' when my whole life is not
sufficient?
No, if it is pain—I will suffer with my whole being.
If it is joy—let joy be like a flame.
Not by order or intimidation will I open my heart.
Freedom is the strongest force.
My love, my faith, my will are firm.
Don't try to pity me
I would not accept your petty, mediocre well-being, even if I had to
die.

1949

NOVY MIR, No. 8, 1956

That Year

OLGA BERGGOLTS

That year! . . . made me remember my whole life,
I lived through everything again. . . .
That year, when from the bottom of the sea and the canals,
My friends began coming back again.

Why should I try to hide the fact that not many returned.
Seventeen years are seventeen long years.
But those who did return first of all rushed
To get their old Party-card.

I will not add a word,
Not a murmur: we are alive again.
That's all I want to say.
Well, comrade, give me your hand,
I am glad that we are together once again.

1955

NOVY MIR, No. 8, 1956

Seven Days of the Week

Excerpts

SEMYON KIRSANOV

Introduction

Open all the doors,
If it is stuffy in the house.
Oh! Soviet Country, you are magnanimous,
You are Liberty itself,
Then open your doors,
Remove the obstacles,
And accept from us with your kind hands
A complaint against those
Whose hearts are hard as stones.

Monday

In murky autumn,
In slush and fatigue,
I wrote that poem
After the Sunday.
On this cloudy,
Humourless dawn,
I suddenly longed
For a morning's new light . . .

For boldness of thought, sound and colour,
For faith
And confidence.
Not to live like a beggar
Behind tightly closed doors . . .
I longed for sound new hearts,
New hearts for those, whose hearts were dead and deaf,
Whose hearts were too tired to work any more. . . .
I knew that not a second had to be lost,
But people walked past with mistrustful glances,
Nobody cared that there should be a heart,
As if there was affinity only with furniture. . . .

Tuesday

My friend has been ill all the week,
He could hardly breathe,
His lips were parched and blue,
His blood-pressure had gone up, his pulse pounded.
In fact, he could only be saved by a new heart. . . .
'A new heart', said the doctor, waving his hands.
I rushed to the Party, to the district committee
To ask for permission to make a new heart
As my friend could not live without one.
'You may', was the answer. . . .

Wednesday

. . . I'm busy, I'm building a model
Of a completely new heart,
A heart for the future,
Able to feel and to love,
A heart to understand all men,
To know whom I should gladly shake by the hand,
And to whom I should never offer my hand. . . .

Thursday

On Thursday, . . .
I found mistakes in the model . . .
What I'd thought was the beat of emotion

Was only a knocking;
What I'd thought was blood
Was only a salt solution.

A Dream on Friday Night

I dreamed of an exhibition,
That I entered a mirrored hall.
I tapped and checked the new hearts. . . .
The Upper Boss, impersonal, impassive,
Stood there as a salesman. . . .
He asked:
'Who are entitled to new hearts?
Certainly not those who are too tired;
Not those who have never reached the upper ranks;
Not those who cannot be called "persons".'
He pushed aside the smaller fry,
He placed somebody's favourites in the queue . . .
The Double-dealers, the Turncoats,
The Slanderers, the Perjurers,
All had permits for new hearts.

Friday

Those who rushed eagerly to our workshop
Were the same whom I had seen the night before:
The Double-dealers . . .
And also the Indifferents . . .
For whom there is no struggle that matters.
They prod new arteries with their fingers,
They fumble with new hearts,
As if they were handling cloth for their new trousers.
And soon they all declared: 'These hearts are not good enough.
Hearts must be solid, like good iron locks . . .
We need hearts that will do all they are told:
So that if they're told to slander—they'll slander:
To praise—they'll praise;
To curse—they'll curse.'
. . . Thus my new heart was condemned while
My dear friend was dying.

Saturday

Everywhere the shops
Were offering hearts for sale:
Hearts made of iron and of rubber,
Hearts to be blown up or stuffed.
Hearts shaped like scent bottles,
Hearts to put in polished verses in albums,
Hearts of macaroni, specially for soups,
Hearts which are silver frames for sweethearts.

* * *

All kind of lies were shaped like hearts,
And the public swallowed them with great delight.

NOVY MIR, No. 9, 1956

This poem was denounced especially strongly and often. It was cited as typical of the offending poetry in the same way that Dudentsev's novel *Not by Bread Alone* was of the prose side of the movement. (*Novy Mir* was, after *Literaturnaya Moskva*, the most censured periodical.)

Conversation with a Pharisee

Excerpts

GEVORK EMIN

Halt, what are you doing?
In whose face are you bolting the door? . . .
Shut up, you frighten me. For God's sake leave off with your slogans
and your lying sermons all in the name of our age.
Stop! I have been awaiting this moment
for a very long time.

Today when our victorious country
Wishes to rid itself of the dirt of the past

You again demagogically hold high
The standard of slogans; you push yourself forward
And you repress our mighty movement. . . .

Didn't I meet you one evening in May?
Do you remember? I was walking with a friend.
You assiduously repressed my sincere feelings, my hopes.
You made fun of me, saying that I was brazen
And that in the heroic period in which we live
I was surrendering to the empty illusions of love.
You insisted that I had forgotten my duty as a poet,
Today as well as for tomorrow's fight.
Yes, I still remember your haughty voice and your attack.
At that time I believed in you
Because you were my elder brother in the Party.
I myself criticised my love
And I even praised you for slapping me down.
What? You don't remember? But I have not forgotten.

When the first war-shell whistled through the air
You, Pharisee, stood up and to the accompaniment of pompous
speeches
You sent us to the front, whereas you stayed at home.
Now that, God be praised, the war has ended
In victory for us, you have become a hero.
Who has given you the right to speak
In the name of the people who but yesterday
Were fighting with heroism at the front,
Who won the war and who returned home with a complete knowledge
of the cost
Of destiny and of human sufferings? . . .

At the front when someone reported in all truthfulness
That we had not eaten for two days,
You (or your brother—that's all the same)
Dressed yourself in judge's robes,

Poured out a flood of slogans,
And sentenced the complainant to death
For slandering the Red Army.
But times have changed.
We who in those terrible battles
Fought without fear until the victory,
We no longer fear you. . . .

Our victorious country is like the sea
When the storm has subsided,
Trying to divest itself of the dirt
And refuse of the past.
But you, again resorting to high-handed methods,
Are trying to take the credit for our country's victory
As if it were your own doing,
And disguising yourself with old slogans,
You are trying to destroy what we are trying to build. . . .

Unlike you, Pharisee,
I cannot make empty speeches.
The ground under my feet is thickly strewn with offal.
I should sweep it away with a steel broom
And not with speeches. . . .
We own no share of the capital
Invested in your shop, trading in refuse,
And we want no share in your bankruptcy.

*Published in SOVETAKAN GRAKANUTIUN**
organ of the Soviet Writers' Union of Armenia,
December 1956, No. 12.

* In the following issue this magazine had to condemn itself for allowing such a poem, and wrote as follows: 'Unfortunately, certain writers, including some very well-known ones, have erred and are presenting anti-artistic and anti-aesthetic work to their readers. The works of G. Emin, which appeared in number twelve (1956) of our review, are among these. Their publication constitutes a serious mistake on the part of the editor.'

Of an Evening

L. KRIVOSHCHÉKOV

The children have gone to sleep,
The house is silent.
Worn out by the children,
My wife too has fallen asleep.

The hour has come for me
To ponder over what I write,
And in the darkness
I reach for my pen.

I need light,
But I cannot switch on the light;
The baby will wake
And start to cry.

And I as before
Do without light
And in the darkness
I write verse about this.

Noiseless verses,
Not for the newspapers,
But the day will come—
And they will see the light.

SOVETSKY KAZAKHSTAN, January 1957

Krivoshchekov's work was censured as 'ideologically pernicious' by the Secretary of the Kazakhstan Central Committee in a speech to the republic's 'literary and artistic aktiv' on October 7, 1947.

Poem

KONSTANTIN VANSHENKIN

The windows' gold has faded
And in the night I hear
Behind the wall a man walking
From wall to wall.

Up and down, in the deaf hours
In lonely sadness.
Perhaps he has quarrelled with his love?
Perhaps no letters come?

Or has he trouble with his work? . . .
I hear in the quiet
Behind the wall he walks
From wall to wall.

Or, perhaps, he has fallen into disgrace
With his boss?
Or perhaps he has real misfortune—
Betrayed by his trusted friend.

Night goes on in step with the hours,
Thick and cold. . . .
Well, perhaps he himself is guilty,
His conscience is not clear.

And he is walking, quarrelling with himself
In the silence of night . . .
Side by side with human grief behind the wall.

Sleep approaches.
Light glimmers in the window . . .
But the man behind the wall still walks
From wall to wall.

LITERATURNAYA MOSKVA, No. 2, 1957

The Unfinished Song

Excerpts

HARIJS HEISLERS

3

The skies are like baskets of blue spring flowers,
Filled with golden hearts of stars. . . .

The eyelids grow heavy,
but at the hall door
You hear voices and a strange commotion.

Disturbed in your sleep, you get up grumbling,
And await what the late callers have to say.
'Pack your things, you must come with us!'
The soldiers say, avoiding your eyes.

'Go with you?'

you ask, looking for your coat.
Your arm fumbles for the sleeve.
You feel overcome by a sudden weakness—
In such a moment you tire as in a lifetime. . .

It seems a ravine has opened under your feet,
And the ceiling seems to fall down on you.
There is suddenly not enough air in the room—
You breathe
 with an effort.

All you have planned for, you see collapsing,
All you have cherished, you feel disappearing. . .
Out in the street, there is still darkness—
The best friend of pain and suffering.

Gone is the bright-blue basket of flowers
Drowned in the dark tones of thunder and rain clouds.

Gone is the closed door,
beyond the corner,
As the car speeds away.

I understand, this is an error,
 But my heart cannot yet grasp it.
 Like a pike caught on a strong line
 My heart cannot find rest tonight.

When finally the rails start droning,
 It feels as though my cheeks were damp.
 Somewhere pines rustle in the wind,
 And time stands still for one short instant.

This is an error and must be righted—
 Without guilt
 you cannot be deported!
 But the train, rattling through the darkness,
 Moans like an angry bull. . . .

At last the train stops at a station,
 My bones feel stiff from hours of travelling,
 In the western sky, flaming like a poppy,
 I see the sun go down in a smoky haze.

I see in the distance, near the horizon,
 The craggy ridges of the Ural mountains.
 Here a man could walk hours and days,
 Losing his tracks in the wind-swept snow.

The blizzards drive the snow so hard
 That even by daylight one can get lost.
 So here you are, my future home—
 Swamps, and gullies, and bluish hills.

In the white swamp a few scant pine trees
 Are wrapped in the pale haze of frost. . . .
 Now,
 defying the cold, you must blossom here.
 Blossom,
 days of my youth!

The frozen clay will not yield to force,
It has been frozen hard for a long time.

Could this be really just an error,
Or maybe even . . . deliberate evil?

I have not yet said these words aloud,
But my bitterness is flowing over.
Doubts grow heavy, feeding like a leech,
They grow more oppressive every minute.

But perhaps I do not realize my guilt—
Perhaps I have deserved this punishment?
I have no peace, trying to solve this riddle,
I have no peace, but I must find the reason!

My memories probe far into the past,
And every step of mind I try to ponder. . . .
I have no guilt!

But Stalin in the Kremlin,
Why does he not rectify this error?

Faith becomes confused with guesswork,
Each new day dawns pale and grey,
I replace my crowbar with a hoe,
But who can replace my clinging doubts?

Some of us lost Klaipeda or Riga,
 Others miss a village on the Volga banks. . . .
 Is it not peculiar to our times—
 Some are guilty, others have to suffer?

Zvaigzne, RIGA, No. 23, December 1956

These are extracts from a long poem in which Heislars, starting as an optimistic young Communist in love with a girl in Riga, is deported and lives for years in Arctic exile. He appeals to Beria, but his appeal is rejected. Letters from his girl arrive rarely. Finally he marries a local woman, and they have children. His daughter is old enough in 1953 to show him *Pravda* with the announcement of Beria's fall. As a result of this event the injustice is remedied and he goes back to Riga. There he meets his former girl, and they discover that they love each other as before. He decides to leave his wife. But finally, with all of them thoroughly unhappy, he does not do so. In spite of his release the results of the unjust arrest continue to embitter his life. The poem ends with the verse:

'Silence.

The question finds no answer.

The hand, which was raised to caress, remains lifeless.

And when I push open the door to the street

All I hear is

the wind's song of autumn. . . .'

EAST GERMANY, BULGARIA, RUMANIA

Finished ?

NILS WERNER

Oh how grand it used to be
Before the February Congress,
Bearing responsibility
Was the leaders' privilege.

Everyone could then at will
Sitting on his own dung-heap
Without the slightest hesitation
Throw the blame on someone else.

All the walls that fell down,
Every badly built house
—produced only sympathy
And the guilt went unpunished.

No one had to think himself
If he could only shout 'hurrah!'
As for taking decisions,
Some senior could do that.

Yes, the narrowest outlook
Brought the highest favour,
Anyone who couldn't stand it
Was an enemy, and guilty.

No one overstrained himself
With the things he should have fixed.
People talked and minuted.
Motto: let him shirk who can.

To curry favour from above
One needed just a line of talk.
Pretend that everything was rosy
And you'd soon collect awards.

Praise to you, you golden years
Full of fair hypocrisy!
Alas, that wonderful time
Is finished now. Finished.—Finished?

EULENSPIEGEL, No. 49, 1956

The reference in line 2 is to the XXth Congress of the CPSU, February 1956.

from Fear

TODOR GENOV

The witness with the flowers:

Lead me, Party, lead me, lead me,
Lead me wherever you wish. . . .

Deyan:

Oh, why has it not led you where you belong!

The witness:

Lead me, Party, lead me!
I am your son and if you wish—
You may make me a Minister! . . .

Deyan:

Look what kind of flower he is.
See where he is soaring. . . .

The witness:

With flowers I will adorn every home,
Happy days will flow,
Only give me an office and a throne
And I will repay you a hundredfold.

Deyan:

See which way the beetle is crawling!

The witness:

Lead me, Party, lead me—
I am ready to sacrifice all!
Send me abroad if you wish
Even there I will follow your call!

Criticizing this poem the Bulgarian *Literaturen Front* of October 17, 1957, says that it is 'not only ridicule of Hristo Radevski's poem *To the Party* but a calumnious statement that our Party is in the hands of scoundrels. . . .'

Literaturen Front of December 26, 1957, condemns the play in which these verses appear even more strongly: 'A caricature of our state apparatus and Communist cadres. A former partisan is given as having the most disgusting vices—he is a murderer, debauchee, good-for-nothing, fraud and sycophant. And this scoundrel lives happily up to the present, crawling upwards and preparing to become a Minister.'

I Have Returned

Excerpt

VICTOR FELEA

Earth, earth,
Your smells have such power
I have returned
To embrace your grass, your trees
To embrace your peace
This invisible sea without waves
In which I too will one day lose myself.

Quoted from *Steua*, Cluj, in *Scinteia*, central organ of the Rumanian Communist Party, of 7 June 1958, which condemns it and other poems, often by old Communists, as 'apolitical verses, without a message, completely cut off from the strivings of the workers of our country'.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Fable of the Trained White Horses

JIRÍ FILIP

The trained white horses,
surely you know them from the circus
on command they show their teeth
or break into a gallop.

If the trainer cracks his whip
they gallop as he wants, even backwards,
each horse in a row of horses' bodies
with the nostrils of its partner at its tail,

And as thus trot the trained white horses
they nod their heads in unison,
and neigh—that's important,
not what they think in secret.

The trainer cracks the whip again, and look,
one trained white show-horse
dilates his nostrils rapturously,
rears up suddenly on his hind legs.

The others paw the ground and swirl the dust,
then gallop again and neigh,
until the man with the whip, their god,
drives them back to their stable.

Moral

This most successful drill
would not be so successful
if these trained white horses
were not frightened—and their mangers were not full.

KVĚTEN, September 1956

The Fate of Epigrams

JAROMÍR HOŘEC

'This epigram cannot be published,
You will certainly admit it,
after all the victim sits today
in a high place!'

Later the same editor says:
'This epigram cannot be published,
it is not topical today—
you see the subject no longer sits there.'

KVĚTEN, February 1957

Also a Journalist

JAROMÍR HOŘEC

It used to be a good custom
that a journalist knew how to write,
But today he receives a decoration
for being a good official;
and writing—how should I say it?—
is a bourgeois relic.

KVĚTEN, February 1957

A Fable

J. R. PICK

There was once a chicken
Who did not take much part in the work of the yard.
But when an unpopular campaign began
against nightingales, she joined in.
You see, there were few in it and
so she thought (that chicken) that thus
she might (that chicken) draw attention to herself from above.

KVĚTEN, March 1957

Decadent '57

J. R. PICK

In his eyes the expression of a human ruin,
under his eyes, shadows.
But he does not commit suicide
like Yesenin,
If he does—then it's like Mayakovsky.

KVĚTEN, March 1957

Note: The Russian poets Yesenin and Mayakovsky committed suicide in 1925 and 1930 respectively. But the former is regarded as decadent and the latter as a Bolshevik paragon.

Fifteen Years Old

J. R. PICK

She has green eyes. Red beads.
And she goes to his room.
But who knows: does she go there according to the new morality
or only within the framework of bourgeois survivals?

KVĚTEN, February 1957

A Well-Known Thing

J. R. PICK

A well-known thing
about our country;
When you meet a man here
who does not grumble about conditions,
he is either a foreigner,
or dumb.

KVĚTEN, February 1957

When Once More . . .

J. R. PICK

When shall we again always and everywhere get used to the fact
that for a man who lies or steals,
beats his mother, to whom he is bound by gratitude,
poisons his wife with arsenic,
sets on fire two, three, four farms,
kills a child and does not bat an eyelid,
a positive attitude to our construction
is not a mitigating circumstance.

KVĚTEN, February 1957

Principles of an Experienced Canary

MILOŠ MACOUREK

Not to sing just anything
That comes into your mind
But to sing a song
Fitting for a canary,
A canary in a cage,
To execute trills,
Sing lightly and clearly,
Not to sing about the cage
But rather about bird food,
Not to think selfishly about oneself
But to sing even about dried flies
In the name of the goldfish living in an aquarium
Who cannot sing,
Being,
As is well known,
Dumb.

HUNGARY

To a Writer-Minister

LÁSZLÓ BENJÁMIN

I am exposing my soul and am giving it freely
While searching for new paths in the craft,
But I don't succeed. No, by God! What shall I try next?
I am expecting that, after a multitude of words,
He will show me, he, who aspires to be a writer,
And not only Minister, and ex-officio father of the arts.
Let me see the word which was made Flesh,
a new Work, a minute bite. . . .
Don't pull my leg forever, my friend:
Hic Rhodos hic salta! I'll believe it when I see it.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, September 17, 1955

This issue of *Irodalmi Ujság* was suppressed. Everyone understood that Benjámín was referring to József Darvas, Minister of Popular Culture under Rákosi, a figure universally despised by creative writers.

The Prodigal Country

FERENC JUHÁSZ

We are lonely wolves, proud wanderers in misty, autumnal forests,
We invade the open country from time to time shrieking, with scraggy
beards;
The foxes swarm in the empty villages, a peewit runs in the field all
alone;
We are meteors sentenced to death, but dare not confess it even to
ourselves.

I am standing on a cliff with my cream-coloured horse, under the
weightless goldleaves of rays,
As if in the middle of a hardened glass mountain, drowned in the lava
of silence,

Without you, Hope, blinded by the full flame of solitude,
My horse, I let you go, or I plunge my sword into your heart.

Sword! Be your scabbard the body of the horse, so slim, which carried
me faithfully.

What is the use of sword, of bow, of the light spear, which bring death
so suddenly?

Soon they will be covered by lazy parched grass, moss, the severe snow.
Be off, my horse, you are needed, you may become yet a hungry, tired
plough-horse.

Quoted in CSILLAG, October 1955

Juhász, who was only twenty-five at the time, was writing (like Illyés), about the Dosza revolt. Even at the time it was understood that he was really speaking of the present. *Csillag*, the Budapest literary paper, wrote openly: 'It is quite evident that he is speaking about himself and not about the peasants of the time of Dosza' when he writes this poem.

Letter About the Cistern and the Pine Tree

Excerpt

GYULA ILLYÉS

Where does the water leak away from the concrete cistern?

Not through a crevice . . .

But in one corner, yet—something! . . . the concrete breaks up and a
gap is forming.

I dip my hand into it; inside the cement is muddy.

I push a nail into it; it reaches something soft.

I pull it out. What do you think it is?

Roots, roots, on the inside of concrete a span deep! . . .

And at the bottom of the cistern roots are everywhere!

They are thin and fine, but alive, oh! how very alive!

They pierce that substance which is hard as iron . . . roots everywhere
. . . I only stared! . . .

What a suction mechanism; what tough lungs have been breathing
here,

which draw the water as if it were air!

What giant strength, what deeply rooted forest has sucked out of this
rocky mountain,
where there is not even any more water, his grim truth?
. . . Throughout everything, and everywhere the people will be
victorious.
Who brought up so many hard and stubborn arguments? I did.

UJ HANG, No. 12, December 1955

The image of concrete referred to a remark attributed to Lenin about the solidity of the Communist regimes.

Péter Bornémissza

Extracts

IMRE CSANÁDI

'Flying ashes are darkening the skies above our country . . . the
scum of the land are taking part in the funeral feast. . . '

'The devil's bailiffs extracted wild ransoms from us, our blood
went with it. . . '

'At that time, it seemed more secure to lie low, not to see, not to
speak. . . '

'But what should he do, whose tongue cannot rest from a torrent
of words . . . he opens his mouth wide and though afraid, like a hero
attacks the Evil One!'

UJ HANG, No. 12, December 1955

A poem on a historical subject, again widely taken to apply to the Rákosi regime.

I Do Not Deserve It . . .

ZOLTAN ZELK

I do not deserve this praise,
believe me, my friend, it burns me to the bone,
that you praise my friendship. . . .

I live like a man, not a tiger.
My ravaged heart is the abode of fear.
Believe me: I am afraid! I am afraid!

I am a man, I live like a man.
How could I be courageous?
Only, I am more frightened of being contemptible
than of dying!

December 1955

IRODALMI UJSÁG, May 5, 1956

On the Back of a Periodical

LÁSZLÓ BENJÁMIN

As long as vice shamelessly shows off,
I will not cease to clamour and to clamour,
no matter what 'side' they say I am on.
The country is up to its roof in trouble—
Why should I be gay?
As long as this people has even one sorrow,
in place of those who speak only
in sighs or curses
I will open my mouth—
but I will not argue, now or later,
with dull careerist hypocrites.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, May 12, 1956

Faith in Freedom

LAJOS KASSÁK

From our yard I walk straight to the mountain when the sun is shining,
And May's soft melodious wind wanders through budding bushes and shrubs.

How relaxed and full of faith a man's heart becomes
When amid all his cares and troubles he can live even for a few hours
According to his own standards, and forget that he is being ridiculed
and slandered

For loving purity and doing better work than others!
Thus, in the morning light my alleged crimes
Are transformed into virtues, at least as far as I am concerned,
And presently I have hope that I shall not fall into the pit.
I do not speak loudly, yet even the smallest blade of grass
Understands my problems, my joys and bitterness,
Just as I understand everything and identify myself with everything.
My lips are parched, but I do not thirst for glory and power,
Just for a few friendly words, an encouraging handshake;
So that I do not stumble on the path I chose,
But that my lungs be strong, my muscles endure the distance,
And to keep inaction from sinking into the mire
Where so many extinct hopes, frustrated purposes, pale skeletons lie
Deep below the barren surface of untilled soil.
Pious resignation can be a virtue, and so can courageous resistance.
I am not one of those who pull the cart backward,
But rather one who rushes forward, holding up the flag of revolt
And in no uncertain terms declares what his heart bids him to declare.
On the far side of the mountain I start down
To see other unknown regions on this beautiful day,
And to let a million miracles give me inspiration
So that my imagination may have free rein.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, August 18, 1956

Ode to Europe

Excerpts

TAMÁS ACZÉL

Europe, your roads become crowded with cars flitting by,
Inquisitive glances pierce veils of your boundaries, your tollgates are
raised;

tens of thousands storm the travel bureaux;

what is this restlessness, fever, longing?

it is as old as mankind

and yet so young;

to see and learn, to wonder and admire,

Europe: old, yet eternally youthful,

Vienna today, Paris tomorrow and London the day after,

no longer unattainable dreams, no longer the pleasure of bored
millionaires.

Europe, your roads are filled with us, simple people,

who stop at corners and ask which way to take—

I too stopped at the corner, the night was filled with lights,

the hum of the crowds, incredible

on the corner of the Graben and the Kaerntnerstrasse

a mere sixty kilometres from the border

and yet, so far, so far.

I must admit, I was a little ashamed,

like the country boy for the first time in the big city,

his head swirling in traffic, he closes his eyes,

gasoline fumes, strange women's scent, Europe.

And then I thought of you, poor Hungary;

I know you well, your dusty roads I've travelled

from Debrecen to Hegyeshalom,

back home everything has a different taste,

I know the language; my mother tongue, only in you

can I live and die, weep and declare my love,

swear tastily like the old peasants of the Plains

that the crop was poor and yet taxes take everything. . . .

★ ★ ★

We raise the gates, look around in the world,
We thrust away the hand that seeks to hold us back,
We have had enough of living in isolation, being passed by,
Let fresh air stream in, the wind blow,
It won't frighten us, indeed not!

IRODALMI UJSÁG, October 6, 1956

The Fallen

LÁSZLÓ BENJÁMIN

On caterpillar tracks, in uniform, Death came for you,
Love, work, hope, good and bad has already been taken away from
you.

And now they are defaming your memory.

Living and dead: you are abused as looters by those
Who want to rob this sad land of its last treasures.
Let now the caterpillar-tracked might come! Let it loot our hearts!

Not tears, but the booming of cannons will bid farewell to the fallen.
What will happen to us? Is liberation only in the grave?
There is no answer. There is only blood, only mourning.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, November 2, 1956

The Dictator

LAJOS KASSÁK

He has sunk for ever. There is no doubt about it.
There never has been a more unsightly death
Never a more relentless detestation.
The cowards left him in the lurch
And the flatterers betrayed him.

He stepped out of a forest of flags
And threateningly roared and stamped his feet.
Those who had eyes he had executed.
Those who had mouths he had executed.
He wanted to make the blood of the whole people flow.
And, in the end, he lies trampled upon
In the snow, in the urine, or under fiery ruins.

Has he paid the penalty, by killing himself?
Is the man who killed him guilty?
Has the world become poorer
Without the harassed days
And the terrifying nights?
No! No!

Now the black night splits in two.
Now germinates
The new corn.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, November 2, 1956

The Blood is Red on the Streets of Pest

LAJOS TAMÁSI

We march, our hearts stirred
by some invisible powers.
Although our song may falter, already
the streets of Pest are ours.

Nothing else is left for us to do,
our only haven now is here:
A drifting brilliance
is rising.

Our banners jubilantly rise,
they float above the wide roads,
the silken colours billow wide,
the streets of Pest again are ours.

Our brave song is heard once again,
with uncommanded and pure hearts.
Whom do you order, Commissar,
to fire the guns we now confront?

The blood is red on the streets of Pest,
it is the blood of workers, young men.
The blood is red on the streets of Pest—
whom do you order to be shot, Commissar?

Whom do you order now to fire,
you, fallen Ministers?
Neither the AVH nor the tanks
can save you.

And in the name of the people you kill,
where are you running in defeat?
Your hands were bloodstained long ago,
Ernö Gerő, can you only kill?

The streets of Pest run red with blood,
until the storm sends down the rain
and washes all the blood away,
yet cannot wash the stain from the cobbles.

The streets of Pest are red with blood,
the blood of workers—of youth—is spilled.
High up beside the tricolour
hoist banners of mourning.

Beneath the tricolour
we make a threefold vow:
We must sorrow for the dead;
we must hate the tyrant;

And a pledge for this small land,
those who live must not forget
freedom was born
out of blood flowing in the streets of Pest.

IRODALMI UJSÁG, November 2, 1956

One Sentence on Tyranny

GYULA ILLYÉS

Where there's tyranny
there's tyranny,
not only in the gun-barrel,
not only in the prison-cell,

not only in the torture-rooms,
not only in the nights,
in the voice of the shouting guard;
there's tyranny

not only in the speech of the
prosecutor, pouring like dark smoke,
in the confessions,
in the wall-tapping of prisoners,

not only in the judge's passionless
sentence: 'Guilty!'
there's tyranny
not only in the martially

curt 'Attention!' and
'Fire!' and in the drum rolls,
and in the way the corpse
is thrust into a hole,

not only in the secretly
half-opened door,
in fearfully
whispered news,

in the finger, dropping
in front of the lips, cautioning 'Hush!'
there is tyranny
not only in the facial expression

firmly set like iron bars,
and in the stillborn
tormented cry of pain within these bars,
in the shower

of silent tears
adding to this silence,
in a glazed eyeball,

there is tyranny
not only in the cheers
of men upstanding
who cry 'Hurrah!' and sing,

where there's tyranny
there's tyranny
not only in the tirelessly
clapping palms,

in orchestras, in operas,
in the braggart statues of tyrants
just as mendaciously loud,
in colours, in picture galleries,

in each embracing frame,
even in the painter's brush,
not only in the sound of the car
gliding softly in the night

and in the way
it stops at the doorway;

where there's tyranny, it's there
in actual presence
in everything,
in the way not even your god was in olden times;

there's tyranny
in the nursery schools,
in paternal advice,
in the mother's smile,

in the way a child
replies to a stranger;

not only in the barbed wire,
not only on the booksellers' stands,
more than barbed wire
in the hypnotic slogans;

it is there
in the goodbye kiss,
in the way the wife says:
'when will you be home, dear?'

in the 'how are you's?'
repeated so automatically in the street,
in the loosening of the grip
to give a nonchalant handshake,

in the way suddenly
your lover's face becomes frozen,
because tyranny is there
in the amorous trysts,

not only in the questioning,
it is there in the declaration of love,
in the sweet drunkenness of words,
like a fly in the wine,

for not even in your dreams
are you alone,
it is there in the bridal bed,
and before it, in the dawning desire,

because you only believe beautiful what
once has already belonged to the tyrant;
you have slept with him
when you thought you were making love to another;

in plate and in glass,
it is there, in your nose, your mouth,
in coldness and dimness,
out of doors and in your room,

as if the windows were open
and the stink of corruption flooded in,
as if in the house
there was a smell of leaking gas;

if you talk to yourself,
it is tyranny that questions you,
even in your imagination
you are not free of it,

above you the Milky Way's different, too:
a frontier zone where the light seeps,
a minefield; and the star
is a spy-hole;

the crowded heavenly tent
—is a single forced-labour camp;
for tyranny speaks
out of fever, out of the sound of bells,

out of the priest in the confessional,
from the sermon,
church, parliament, torture-chamber
are all only a stage;

you open and close your eyes,
only this looks at you;
like an illness,
it accompanies you like memory;

in the train's wheels you can hear it,
you're prisoner, you're prisoner, that's what it repeats;
on a mountain or beside the ocean,
this is what you breathe;

the lightning flashes, it is this
that's present in every unexpected
noise and light,
in the missing heart-beat;

in tranquillity,
in the boredom of the shackles,
in the whisper of the rain,
in the bars that reach to the sky;

in the falling of the snow
white like the prison wall;
it looks at you
out of your dog's eyes,

and because it's there in every ambition,
it is in your tomorrow,
in your thought,
in every one of your gestures;

like a river in its bed
you follow it and you create it;
you spy out of this circle?
it looks at you from the mirror,

it watches you, you would run in vain,
you're prisoner and warder at the same time;
into the tang of your tobacco,
into the fabric of your clothes,

it seeps in, etches like acid
down to your marrow,
you would like to think yet no idea
but it comes into your mind

you would like to look but you see only
what it creates like magic in front of you,
and already there is a circle of fire,
a forest-fire made out of match-sticks,

because when you dropped one,
you didn't crush it;
and thus it guards you now,
in the factory, in the field, in the house;

and you no longer feel the meaning of life,
what is meat and bread,
what it is to love, to desire
with wide-open arms,

thus the slave himself
forges and bears his own shackles;
when you eat you nourish it,
you beget your child for it,

where there's tyranny
everyone is a link in the chain;
it stinks and pours out of you,
you are tyranny yourself;

like moles in the sunshine,
we walk in the dark,
we fidget in our chamber
as if it were the Sahara;

because where there's tyranny
all is in vain,
even the song, however faithful,
whatever the work you achieve,

for it stands,
in advance at your grave,
it tells you who you have been,
even your dust serves tyranny.

1950

IRODALMI UJSÁG, November 2, 1956

POLAND

Poem for Adults

ADAM WAŻYK

I

I jumped by mistake on the wrong bus;
people sat as usual returning from work.
The bus swept down a strange road,
through Holy Cross Street. You are no longer a Holy Cross!
Where are your antique shops, your bookstalls and students?
Where are you, the dead?
Even your memory fades.

Then the bus stopped
at a little square which had been dug up.
The back of an old four-storey house
stood waiting its fate.

I got off at the little square
in a working class quarter,
with memories shimmering from the grey walls.

People were hurrying home
and I dared not ask where I was.
Was I not here as a child, visiting the chemist?

I went home,
like a man who had gone out to buy medicine,
and returned twenty years later.

My wife asked: Where were you?
The children asked: Where were you?
I was silent, trembling like a mouse.

2

The squares, like cobras, hold their beauties high;
the houses flaunt themselves like peacocks.
Give me one fragment of old stone.
Let me find myself back in Warsaw.

I stand like a mindless post
under the lamps in the square,
I praise, I wonder, I curse,
with cobra, with abracadabra.

I let myself go, like a hero,
beneath the compassionate columns.
What do I care for these Galluxa* puppets
painted as if for the coffin!

Here young people buy ices!
Oh, here all are young,
their memories hold only ruins;
the girl will shortly give birth.

Here tawdriness takes hands with compassion:
what has grown into stone will endure.
Here you will learn your letters
future poet of Warsaw.

It is natural for you to love them.
I loved other stones,
grey and great,
ringing with memories.

The squares, like cobras, hold their beauties high;
the houses flaunt themselves like peacocks.
Give me one fragment of old stone:
let me find myself back in Warsaw.

3

'Today our skies are not empty'—from a political speech

It was dawn. I heard the whistling of jets.
They are expensive, and yet we must . . .
When we no longer want to talk about the earth we know
then we say: The sky is not empty.

* A Warsaw 'luxury' store.

People walk here uncaring in rags,
our women soon grow old.
When we no longer want to talk about the earth we know
then we say: The sky is not empty.

Over the ocean in the clouds seethes
the apocalypse; here the passer-by kneels down . . .
when we do not want to talk frankly about the earth,
the kneeling man says: The sky is not empty.

A legion of boys releases doves
a girl knots a scarf . . .
when we do not want to talk frankly about the earth,
then we say: The sky is not empty.

4

From villages, from little towns, they go in wagons,
to build a foundry, to conjure up a town,
to dig out a new Eldorado.
A pioneer army, a gathered mob.
They crowd each other in barracks, in hostels, in huts.
They plunge and whistle in the muddy streets:
the great migration, dishevelled ambition,
on their necks a little string—the Cross of Czestochowa.
With a storehouse of oaths, with a little feather pillow,
bestial with vodka, boasting of tarts,
a distrusting soul—wrenched from the bounds,
half-awake and half-mad,
silent in words, singing snatches of song—
is suddenly thrust out from mediaeval darkness,
A migrating mass, this inhuman Poland,
howling with boredom in December evenings. . . .
From rubbish baskets swinging on ropes
boys run like cats on the walls;
from the women's hostels, those lay monasteries,
sounds of lust and travail. The duchesses
will be rid of their issue—the Vistula flows near by.

The great migration builds new industry,
unknown to Poland but known to history,
is fed on great empty words, lives
wildly from day to day in despite of preachers—
amid coal fumes is melted in this slow torture
into a working class.
Much is wasted. As yet only dross.

5

And it happened this way: a brown column
of smoke burst from a burning mine,
a gallery is cut off; of the agony below
no-one will tell; the black tunnel is a coffin.
The saboteur had blood, bones, hands.
A hundred families mourn, two hundred families;
they write in the papers, or they do not write.
Only smoke wreathing the air hangs over all.

6

In the railway station
Miss Jadzia in the buffet,
so charming when she yawns,
so charming when she pours . . .
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA!

Here you'll be poisoned for sure,
Miss Jadzia'll make off with your boots,
so charming when she yawns,
so charming when she pours . . .
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA!

Don't go, boy, to Nowa Huta,
You will be poisoned on the way,
be warned by this ominous poster,
in your stomach you have a People's fish:
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA!

7

I will never believe, my dear, that a lion is a little lamb,
 I will never believe, my dear, that a little lamb is a lion!
 I will never believe, my dear, in a magic spell;
 I will never believe in minds kept under glass;
 but I believe that a table has only four legs,
 but I believe that the fifth leg is a chimera,
 and when the chimeras rally, my dear,
 then one dies slowly of a worn out heart.

8

It is true,
 when these farthing boredoms
 howl down the great aims of education,
 when the vultures of abstraction pick out our brains,
 when students are enclosed in text books without windows,
 when language is reduced to thirty incantations,
 when the lamp of imagination is extinguished,
 when good people from the moon deny us our taste,
 then truly
 oblivion is dangerously near.

9

A drowned man was fished out of the Vistula.
 A note was found in his pocket:
 'My sleeve is right,
 my button is wrong,
 my collar is wrong,
 but my half-belt is right.'
 They buried him under a willow.

10

In the newly painted street of fresh built flats,
 mortar dust floats in the air, a cloud covers the sky,
 steamrollers flatten the road,
 transplanted chestnuts are greening, they rustle in the dusk.

Under the chestnuts run children, big and small,
from the half-demolished frames they take wood for the kitchen.
Fifteen-year-old little whores go down the planks to the cellars,
they have plaster smiles, they smell of mortar.
Nearby the radio plays in the darkness, unearthly dance music.
Night is coming, hooligans play as hooligans will.
How difficult it is to fall asleep in the years of your childhood, among
the rustling chestnuts. . . .

Float away into darkness, you dissonance!
I wanted to find joy in the newness,
I wanted to tell of a young street, but not that one.
Have I lost the gift of seeing, or the gift of convenient blindness?
I am left with a short note, with these verses of a new grief.

II

Racketeers enticed her to a quiet hell
in a retired villa out of town—
she escaped, and wandered through the night, drunk.
She lay on the pavement till morning.
She was thrown out of the Art School for want of a socialist morality.
She poisoned herself once—they saved her.
She poisoned herself twice—they buried her.

It is all very old. Old are the twisters
of socialist morality.

The dreamer Fourier beautifully prophesied
that the sea would flow with lemonade.
And does it not flow?

They drink sea-water,
and cry—
Lemonade!
They return quietly home
to vomit
to vomit.

They ran to us, shouting:
A communist does not die.

It never happened that a man did not die.
Only the memory abides.
The worthier the man,
the greater the pain.

They ran to us, shouting:
Under socialism
a cut finger does not hurt.

They cut their finger,
they felt pain.
They lost faith.

They cursed the routinists.
They taught the routinists.
They shamed the routinists.
They called in literature to help—
a five-year-old snotty-nosed child,
who needs educating,
who needs to educate others—
Is this routinist an enemy?
Routinist is not an enemy.
Routinist should be taught.
Routinist should be enlightened.
Routinist should be shamed.
Routinist should be convinced.
He should be educated.

They turn people into feeding bottles.
I heard a clever lecture:
'Without appropriately distributed
economic incentives
we will not achieve technical progress.'
These are the words of a Marxist.

This is the knowledge of the law of realism.
The end of utopia.

No story will be told of the routinist,
but there will be novels about the troubles of the inventor,
of the fears which disquiet us all.

This is a naked poem,
before it is clothed
with vexations, colours and the smells of this earth.

14

There are people overworked,
there are people from Nowa Huta
who have never been to a theatre,
there are Polish apples which Polish children cannot reach,
there are boys forced to lie,
there are girls forced to lie,
there are old wives turned away from their homes by their husbands,
there are the weary dying of tired hearts,
there are people slandered, spat upon,
there are people stripped in the streets by common bandits,
for whom the authorities still seek a legal definition,
there are people who wait for documents,
there are people who wait for justice,
there are people who wait very long.

We make demands on this earth,
for the people who are overworked,
for keys to open doors,
for rooms with windows,
for walls which do not rot,

for hatred of little documents,
for holy human time,
for safe homecoming,
for a simple distinction between words and deeds.

We make demands on this earth,
for which we did not throw dice,
for which a million perished in battle:
for a clear truth,
for the bread of freedom,
for burning reason,
for burning reason.

We demand these every day.
We demand through the Party.

NOWA KULTURA, August 1955

A Dream

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

I fell asleep under a tree in the heat of the day,
the tree was swaying with fruit.
I awoke under the tree
in the starry darkness of night.

I saw in dream the country,
in elemental earth and water,
I saw in dream the country,
of which I prefer to be silent.

From COLLECTED POEMS
by M. Jastrun, Warsaw 1956

The Man

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

I saw a man
who was murdered by angels,
tortured with questions,
bloated with a suffocated cry,
a living corpse,
a victim of morality.
And I was unable to help him
because he deserved only pity, exiled.
And I had to kill him,
joining with the angels in
stamping, tearing in pieces, quartering
his miserable heart:
human, after all, his heart.

From COLLECTED POEMS
by M. Jastrun, Warsaw 1956

Songs of Autumn and Winter

PAWEL HERTZ

Little will remain after me,
even the woman's short cry
will not cut the silence, the shadow on the wall
will vanish when the candlelight dies.

Not with my compatriots but with myself,
for years I have led nightly talks;
between injury and mourning
constantly echo other young poems.

Oh, neither Romance and Ballads,
nor the delicate webs of Telimena!
Pale, I open the book in the night
and read the severe poem: To Mother . . .

He reaches my very heart
and grips my throat . . . what can I do:
like freedom itself is this book,
like a tear dropped on a young grave.

★ ★ ★

Alone, by myself, in the deepness of night
I worry, I brood, I think.
As though calling for help
a little boat hoots on the Vistula.

Here all is as usual. Two windows
like the eyes of the world stare in.
I know: this night is make-believe,
so glares a crooked old hag.

A strange house. A strange night. My cause.
In trouble, in care, I will not change these thoughts.
Warsaw sleeps in silence.
My conscience speaks.

★ ★ ★

As sound is to music and colour to the picture,
so this is to poetry—a voice which is free, pure, elegant,
which lasts for centuries like earth, water, sky,
in peace forges armour for the future war.

When the heartless night descends in white frost,
when the blue ice drips from the black birch boughs,
my foreigner, in our sad landscape,
go down from the stairway of rhyme on to the flat land of prose.

And what will you understand here, where the river, chained by ice,
trembles with a deep current and its waters roll?
Beyond the village fence a she-wolf hunted by dogs
gives her breast to the twins that they may build a young Rome.

I will not live to see the day, the winter may freeze me,
my heart's beat will stop from bitterness, anxiety, tedium,
but with dying eyes I hope to see that day
when a pure, free voice will be heard by all the peoples.

TWORCZOŚĆ, No. 3, 1955

These verses contain evocations of well-known poems by Adam Mickiewicz. Mickiewicz wrote most of these poems in Paris after the suppression of the Polish national uprising against Russia in 1830-1. They express the longing of an exile to see his people free from foreign occupation.

One May .

JÓZEF PRUTKOWSKI

Skull-decorated notices doubly and trebly warning
and threatening for various reasons.
'Not to be used when stationary.'
'Not to be used on special occasions.'
'Not below the waist.'
'Not above the line.'
'It is forbidden to sound wind instruments.'
'It is forbidden to prophesy to cobblers.'
'It is forbidden to compose poetry, especially when the muses don't
wish it.'
'It is forbidden to model celebrities in snow
And to compose out of thin air.'
Do not lean out of the window;
And anyhow one shouldn't overstep the line.
But one may crawl along with a haughty mien on a safe path.
No one was ever punished here for being safe.
Slowly, quietly, furtively, and shiftily one may find out what can be
got.
What's on the political exchange?
What is the stock of courage today?
Flattery now here, now there.

Some have been doing it for eleven years and
It's not done without grace.
The editor knows their names and addresses.

NOWA KULTURA, November 20, 1955

Critique of the Poem for Adults

Excerpts

ADAM WAŻYK

A woman, not old,
But an old communist,
Holds out her hand and cries:
Take from me the rags of dogma.
Give me an ordinary coat.

She woke up all in wounds
Like a stigmatic,
Drops stream from her brow—
The blood of those murdered
In bureaucracy's dungeons.

We will not be cured by balms.
I bring you an ordinary coat
And I bring you an ordinary catharsis.

The unfortunate—
She holds out her hand and cries:
A lampoon!

★ ★ ★

Those sitting in the High Tent,
The snake charmers,
The holders of passes to special shops

Where they sell pants
Embroidered with the dogma of infallibility,
Thinkers,
Sitting out theses
Which the host of executives never understand,
Who daily distribute
Seventy thousand types of formulae,
On holidays
Sweets to the crowd:
Inquisitors,
Preachers,
Flagellants,
Spartans,
Put on your gala trousers!
The Kingdom of God on earth
Will start
A fortnight from today.

It will be the last banquet:
Leviathan in mustard.
Start from the tail,
For the head of the fish stinks.
Afterwards a delightful gluttony:
Socialist realism with mushrooms
Roasted
On the superstructure's highest scaffold.

Mountains of toast will grow:
'We fight for the purity of the dustbins!'
Free discussion will flow
Within dams of silence,
Later will come on the table
A treble melba of stone.

Straight from work
Comes running
A girl in slacks:
—Give me some sausage,
I'm ravenously hungry.
I work by day.

At night I earn more.
I am already sixteen.
Once I accosted a poet.
I asked 'What's the time?'
The poet drew out his watch.
Oh, stupid!
And such a one wrote the *Poem for Adults*?
He hasn't grown up to my navel.
I went into the Aleje,
I went into the Aleje,
My short biography with me:
I am already sixteen—

Canvas of the High Tent will fold back,
A zealous homunculus
Will publish a statement:
—The girl is lying.
This is no normal appetite,
It is devils rumbling in her belly,
Lucifer of the right-wing deviation,
Beelzebub of the petit bourgeois pressure,
Baphomet of the intellectual confusion.
The girl is possessed.

The girl doesn't want a melba of stone.
Exorcise Satan!

★ ★ ★

They lived with the dawn
And have sown darkness.

They lived with the idea
And they parted with people.

They lived with a dream
And lies have become their daily bread.

From medieval eyes,
From medieval ears,
From medieval smells,

From medieval brains,
From medieval methods,
The party will free the stream of revolution
And will become the party of Lenin's image.

November–December, 1955

From COLLECTED POEMS
by A. Ważyk, Warsaw 1956

The Genius of Consequence

ADAM WAŻYK

Why are these clients going without permits
Into the Central Egg Agency? An office isn't a bazaar
Why does the chief's secretary,
Against express instructions, closing the door
Leave the telephone directory on the table?
Why does an honest woman, an old servant
—Three hundred zlotys monthly, and so she's not out of work,
After service hours wash in her tub
Linen brought from town and doesn't hear
What's happening in her flat?

In his face and outlook

Like a thousand or a hundred thousand
Other men, in an autumn coat and soft hat
One of the intelligentsia from the coffee shops,
an intruder without a pass
Opened the door with a master-key, went into the study,
The telephone directory was lying on the table.
He easily found the well-known number,
He dialled the number, gave the agreed information,
And three-quarters of an hour later—I don't know his name,
A young man with grey temples, an inventor,
Who had devoted his life for the good of mankind,
Attacked in his own apartment, under the threat
Of a revolver lost a volume of blueprints.

He was the first to invent a juke-box, an instrument
Which plays by itself when you toss a coin in.
To a juke-box rhythm he invented some wall-paper
Yellow wall-paper with flowers, only yesterday.
Finally he invented a bicycle. There won't be any bicycles
Because agents stole the volume of blueprints.

Who directed this band that went without passes
Into the Central Egg Agency?

You who are reading this!

Remember, well, remember, remember.
In every ounce of air is a potential enemy.
Just breathe, that's enough. Yesterday you were weak
From an excess of air and with the coming of spring.
A mystic hesitation pushed you towards the telephone!
Roman law doesn't work. You admit your guilt.

March 5, 1956

NOWA KULTURA, April 8, 1956

The Dream of Bureaucrats

ADAM WAŻYK

In the land of crickets
Centralised crickets
Everything goes round
Correctly like a clock

The specialist is behind his desk
The foreman is under control
Where there is one worker
There are two chancery clerks

An official over every
Sugar beet
A hail of stones is flying
And a load of forms.

Wrong down below
Infallible up top
Painted with halos
Of Byzantine gold.

On a pin-head
Five hundred angels
And all are blowing
Trumpets of numb language

In the land of crickets
Poetry has stopped.
Five watchmakers
Will have to mend it.

NOWA KULTURA, April 8, 1956

Questions of a Party Man

Excerpt

WIKTOR WOROSZYLSKI

The Party is an undefiled well.
Does this mean
I need no longer wash?
The Party is mighty rock.
Am I then one grain of dust
damned to inaction?
The Party is the mind of our class.
Am I then to have nothing
under my scalp?
The Party is ultimate voice.
Am I only a trembling
mute membrane?
The Party is ultimate authority.

Must I, a shoemaker,
ask the Central Committee
how to make shoes?
Must I, a gardener,
ask how to tend apple and cherry trees?
Must I, a musician,
explain the dancing notes in my head?
The Party is right.
Is he who stands at the top of the hierarchy
always right?
The Party is monolith.
Am I a renegade
every time I doubt?

PO PROSTU, May 5, 1956

The Return

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

He arrived in a black car,
Ran up steep steps to the flat,
Said only: 'Do not ask!'
Full of scared anticipation
In his coat and hat
He buried himself in a corner,
Did not move his hand,
Did not switch on the light.
Suddenly heard a roar.
Then
A star
Burned an arc behind the window,
Fell.

From HOT ASHES,
an anthology. Warsaw 1956

The Epoch

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

From one window I saw
Garages of the Security Police.
Building for two years
Girded with barbed wire
Guarded by high camp towers—
Prisoners.

Rising at dawn to the whine of sirens,
Unwilling, sleepy,
In grey prisoner's dress,
They built the vault of a steel hall
For mechanical animals.
Sometimes one of them tried to escape.
Then was heard close, close,
The dry crack of rifle shots.

From a second window I saw
Another building grow.
Free builders
Raised a wall,
Unknown:
Wall of a lunatic asylum or the House of the Dead.

You told me:
'If you do as they want,
You will find yourself here.
If you resist,
You will find yourself there.'

From HOT ASHES,
an anthology. Warsaw 1956

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

During the interrogation he kicked a prisoner
On the ankle, so he was nicknamed 'Little Horse'.
He said: The people, Poland, Europe—
But in the eyes some savage light
Flashes from behind bars. Much blood,
Not his, he shed—for the idea.
There was a time that, when he frowned
The prisoners shuddered in the glare.
There was a time when he ordered women to be hung
By their hair. But why resurrect
Those past times without hope?

Now in his former prisoners' cell
He sees: near a bone lies a bone
And a skull near a skull whitens
Among dry ribs and femurs
On which someone will one day play.

From HOT ASHES,
an anthology. Warsaw 1956

Coming out of Prison

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

Five years he sat in the cell under sentence of death.

In that time
Each day the sun staggered across the vault,
The stars hovered,
From small rooms thick with stench
Alcohol gushes,
Music pours from the radio

And smacking the window, runs into the street.
They stuttered: Marx Engels justice . . .
They stuttered: Holy Father said . . .
They stuttered: flicks bargains Jesumaria . . .

In that time
He was woken from sleep
Blinded by a searchlight,
Drowned in water,
His fingers broken—
Until his body became so light and transparent
That one could see his spirit
Curled like an embryo in its mother's womb.

Suddenly an unknown warder opened the door,
With his dead wife's features
And his son's eyes. (They died while he was in prison.)
He heard the blare of trumpets. He saw the angels of Sodom.

From HOT ASHES,
an anthology. Warsaw 1956

The Judge

MIECZYSLAW JASTRUN

One half of the face is dark,
The other—light.

Formally—in the hall of the High Court he
Utters three hundred official slogans a minute.
His sentences are severe on principle.
But within four walls, with a friend, eyes interlocked,

He uses human language,
Is incorrectly pale.

At night—he shows a heart
Pierced with the arrow of love.
At night—he jumps screaming.
He shows stigmata
Wet with the blood of his victims.

One half of the face is dark,
The other—light.

The dark half says:
'Repression is recommended.
Punishment must be severe.
I bow my head to the law.'

Suddenly his brow bursts into a star,
Into a wound.
Cain's.

The court floods with a great light.

Who am I?
Cain or Abel?
Not I,
The former—Cain.

Don't accuse me!
Law like truth is weak.
What is truth?
A lifetime doing my duty,
Nothing more.
I wash my hands.
No!
I am sentenced by that old prejudice
Which is called conscience.

My Lord!
I am guilty.

On the wall a shadow with a rifle.
Silence.

From HOT ASHES,
an anthology. Warsaw 1956

Note on an Exhibition of French Painting in Warsaw

MIECZYSLAWA BUCZKOWNA

Freedom leading Delacroix
To the barricades
Seemed, when I saw it first,
Too symbolic and
Perhaps out of context.
I walked away, cheated.
But only a few days later,
In the July sun,
I was suddenly struck
By its acuity:
I recognized the faces
Of the workers of Poznan.

TWORCZOŚĆ, December 1956

Meditations

JERZY WALENCZYK

I

Because I build, not to build again,
Because there is no faith without disillusion,
Everything, everything has to be said.

Days begun, days ended,
Real as a book-keeper's account,
Strange as owls glimmering with darkness.

And he, the noble protector, patron of arts,
Talking in Georgian with industrious Beria,
That no one may understand too much, too early.

Beneath the weight of the northern canals
Corpses swing
The green fog will untie and dissolve.

Beneath dry sands
The silent white bones of human wrecks,
Without willows, without sighs, without prayers, without entreaties.

Nadiezhdha Krupskaya will no more protect
The innocent, the dying, those executed like rats.
She said: Lenin warned often of him.

Because I build, not to build again,
Because there is no faith without disillusion,
Everything, everything has to be said.

A warning not to be taken lightly.
A problem not only for a psychologist.

II

My nation, a reference number in a filing cabinet,
Is dumb with an open mouth,
Without coal, without butter, without houses to live in.

Speaking of butter we affirm the stomach's existence,
Speaking of matter we exclude metaphysics,
Speaking of a stomach we affirm the existence of matter.

A boundless, infinite nation,
Against shadowed cornfields of passion,
Builds, not to build again.

Hands for machines, truth under the nails,
Brows spread with the spring of factory yards,
Where the rust of waste parts is eaten by lamenting rains.

Let this rhythm reach the quiet of green offices,
Let the gale be heard, which batters life here,
And the dark thunder which rolls here, let it strike there.

The polite, who adore comrade A.
The unthinking, who adore comrade B.
The cunning, who adore comrade C.

The air, a necessary counsel
To these dialecticians of mediocrity.

III

Because of the thick mist from the dyeworks,
Because baskets of wet yarn are heavy,
There are those who have not seen a theatre.

Neither the darkness when the lights dim,
Nor the vacuum between two fractions of life
Which trembles with the wings of imagination's birds.

Though they have tickets, they have no suits,
Though they have suits, they lack courage,
For the mist from the dyeworks is thick.

Because they are ashamed of their mirrors and their gestures,
Christenings, weddings, death,
Vodka on the table.

Cramped flats, floors washed on Saturday
And covered with newspaper—the Persian carpet.

IV

In the legend all was simple.
Even smoke was a memory of fire.

So you passed the laboratories without discoveries,
Farms without grain, books without people?

Thus the wind rends the window's curtain,
After bravos, cheers, the smoke of incense,
After ceremonies, encores, after fiery anthems,
After long speeches, yards of Roman tunics

Which unveil the orator's nakedness,
After enemies of the people, undefined.

I rub my eyes at these happenings.

And I fear the whisper of my own voice,
And the rustling step of the late passer-by.

PO PROSTU, December 23, 1956

Qui Tacent Clamant

ADAM WAŻYK

I was with you on that day, when beneath the statue of Bem
You raised Hungarian and Polish flags.

I know not who of you is wounded, and who is no more
Since the voices ceased, and the fires have been burning.

Your voice, Tibor Dery, in the hour of confusion
Telephoned to ask for my safety;
And this voice I heard from the Parliament building
Broke in the ether like the final cry.

We, who were history's conscience, are silent,
Reasons of state enforce this dumb speech. . . .
Where over the corpses of rebels the bitter smoke creeps,
The last myth has collapsed. Remains the monument of Bem.

NOWA KULTURA, November 23, 1956

Note: Ważyk was in Budapest during the October Rising. To show sympathy with the events in Poland the Hungarians demonstrated at the statue of General Bem, a Pole who held high command in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-9, also crushed by the Russians. Ważyk's friend, Tibor Déry, Communist Hungary's leading writer, is in prison. Ważyk also refers, in lines 7-8, to Imre Nagy's last radio appeal.

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